DECISION NOTICE
and
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
for the
Red-Cockaded Woodpecker Habitat and Canebrake Restoration Project

September 2004

USDA Forest Service
Southern Region
Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests
Oconee Ranger District
Jones County, Georgia

BACKGROUND

The red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) is endemic to open, mature and old-growth pine ecosystems in the southeastern United States. Due to a nearly complete loss of habitat, and subsequent extreme decline in population size, the RCW was federally listed as endangered in 1970. Currently, less than three percent of the species' former population size exists. The Oconee National Forest (including the Hitchiti Experimental Forest) and the adjacent Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge both contain remnant RCW populations and the potential to support many more clusters, or family groups, of these woodpeckers.

In 1995, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Region 8 Record of Decision (ROD) for the *Management of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker and its Habitat on National Forests in the Southern Region* Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) directed National Forests to delineate Habitat Management Areas (HMAs) to support the recovery of the RCW. The management direction on the Oconee National Forest designated 52,966 acres of the Forest as a HMA for the RCW.

According to the revised RCW Recovery Plan, the Oconee National Forest and Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge together make up one secondary core population of RCW, referred to as the Piedmont Recovery Unit. The plan defines a secondary core population as "a population identified in recovery criteria that will hold at least 250 potential breeding groups at the time of and after delisting." In 2000, the Piedmont Recovery Unit had 59 breeding pairs—20 on the Oconee National Forest and 39 on the Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge. To bring the RCW population in the Piedmont Unit up to the recovery objective of 250 breeding pairs, the USFS has developed a recovery program in accordance with the objectives and direction provided in the revised RCW Recovery Plan (January 2003). As part of this recovery program, the USFS, in coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) plans to allow either natural population expansion or when necessary translocate (bring in adult birds from another population) RCWs from a population with an excess number of birds to repopulate proposed habitat sites on the Oconee National Forest. In order to successfully translocate RCW breeding pairs or allow endemic population expansion, the proposed sites must have suitable RCW

foraging and nesting habitat. This habitat can be obtained by vegetation manipulation and other silvicultural methods.

As a result of several lawsuits dating back to the early 1990s, the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest has had to withdraw a number of projects and timber sales on the Forest, which has affected the ability to meet certain natural resource objectives. In addition, several needed resource management activities on the Forest have not been conducted in recent years due to lack of appropriated funds or not being eligible for KV (Knutson-Vandenberg) dollars. With the exception of a few activities to address the southern pine beetle (SPB) and some prescribed burning, there has been limited active management to address RCW habitat needs on the Oconee National Forest.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

Under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), there are legislative requirements to positively manage for endangered species like the RCW on Federal lands. A prime objective of the Oconee National Forest is to follow the ESA by providing habitat for the recovery of the RCW by restoring and managing a pine ecosystem, which furnishes preferred habitat for RCW foraging and nesting.

Existing habitat is not suitable for the RCW within the project area on the Oconee National Forest. A majority of the pine stands within the project area have excessive amounts of pine stems beyond the preferred habitat requirements (see Revised RCW Recovery Plan). Preferred habitat is between 40 and 70 basal area (BA), while current stand information within the project area shows basal areas over 90. Thus, at present, stands do not provide the open park-like stands that the RCW needs for suitable habitat. RCWs require open areas of mature pines 60 years and older for nesting. Foraging habitats vary in age but usually areas that are pine savannas with little, if any, midstory of hardwood (USFWS, 2003a).

The Hitchiti Experimental Forest (Management Area 3.B in the Revised Forest Plan; USFS, 2004a) is located within the RCW Sub-HMA and must comply with RCW management direction. The management of the RCW is currently listed as Goal 51 and Management Prescriptions 8.D and 8.D.1 in the Chattahoochee-Oconee Forest Plan (USFS, 2004a). Desired conditions for the RCW are stated here. The Oconee National Forest is not currently meeting these desired conditions. Under the ESA and RCW Recovery Plan, the Forest RCW population has been declared a Recovery population and the Forest is mandated by law to bring about this recovery. Habitat management is clearly necessary for the recovery of the species and therefore meeting the purpose and need.

Canebrake is considered a rare community in the Forest Plan. Goal 44 directs the identification and delineation of rare communities and then incorporates them into management prescriptions. Objective OBJ-9.F-05 establishes the need to restore 15 acres per year of canebrake on the Oconee NF. Canebrakes are important habitats for a number of species. Canebrake restoration will occur on sites currently supporting cane. Such sites can be found along Caney Creek which forms the northern border of the project area.

DECISION

Based on my review of the Final EA, including the discussion of the alternatives considered, the issues associated with this proposal, the environmental effects analysis, and my personal knowledge of the area, I have decided to select the actions in Alternative 2 (see attached maps for project activities by compartment). This alternative primarily consists of using vegetation manipulation by thinning and midstory control (via mechanical methods, herbicide use, and prescribed fire) to help restore habitat for the RCW within Compartments 5, 6, and 8. Specific activities that would occur under Alternative 2 are listed and described below.

- Thin approximately 790 acres in Compartments 5, 6 and 8 to reduce stands to a 60 square-foot basal area (BA). Of the total acres to be thinned, the majority (576 acres) is mature pine saw timber, with smaller portions of immature pine saw timber (214 acres). **Table DN-1** shows a breakdown of the approximate number of acres proposed for thinning in each compartment. All vegetation management activities would be implemented in accordance with Forest Plan standards and *Georgia's Best Management Practices for Forestry* (GDNR et al., 1999).

Table DN-!. Acres Proposed for Thinning By Compartment under Alternative 2

Comp.	Stands	Total Comp. Acres*	No. Acres to be Thinned*	No. Acres For Each Stand Type*		
				Mature Pine Sawtimber	Immature Pine Sawtimber	Pine Pole Timber/ Precommercial
5	1-7, 9, 11, 50-54	680	504	504	0	0
6	1, 3, 7, 10-12, 17-23, 25-28, 31, 32, 58, 59	312	81	30	51	0
8	1, 3-6, 8-10, 12, 14, 15, 17-22, 26-29, 32, 33, 35-38, 63-65	441	205	42	163	0
TOTAL		1433	790	576	214	0

*Includes National Forest System lands only.

- Shelterwood harvest on approximately 93 acres of lightly stocked overmature stands previously impacted by SPB in Compartment 5 (stand 6); Compartment 6 (stand 10); Compartment 8 (stands 3, 5, and 7).
- Uneven-aged management on approximately 30 acres in Compartment 6 (stand 7). The Southern Research Station will incorporate this treatment into their long-term research program on the Hitchiti Experimental Forest.
- Conduct prescribed burning of approximately (1100 acres) over the next several years, including growing season burns within recruitment stands to control midstory vegetation.
- Develop thirty 10- to 20-acre RCW recruitment sites approximately ¼ to ½-mile apart (USFWS guidelines) on Compartment 5 (stands 1-7, 50, 52, 54, 55); Compartment 6 (stands 1, 3, 4, 6, 9-11, 15); Compartment 8 (1, 3-7, 10, 19): rehabilitate old recruitment sites on

Compartment 5 (stand 50, 52, 53, 54), Compartment 6 (stand 9); and Compartment 8 (stand 12).

- Create 120 RCW artificial cavities/inserts (at least 4 cavities available for each RCW recruitment site) after thinning and prescribed burning, including boundary signage and tree marking.
- Use a combination of herbicides and mechanical methods to control unwanted vegetation on approximately 887 acres within RCW foraging and nesting areas (see **Table DN-2**). All hardwoods within the areas are not considered as unwanted vegetation. Hardwoods would remain within riparian areas and on sites where determined to be the best species left in place. Fruit-bearing species would not be targeted for removal and hard mast bearing species (oaks and hickories) would be favored over other hardwood species. Unwanted vegetation also includes invasive species such as privet, kudzu, and wisteria. Treatments (herbicides, mechanical, prescribed fire) needed to control unwanted vegetation would be determined upon post-harvest evaluations. Herbicides would be applied manually (foliar spray or injection); no aerial application of herbicides would occur. When implemented, foliar spray applications would be applied to unwanted vegetation less than 5 feet in height. Felling with stump treatment applications or injection applications would be used to treat unwanted vegetation over 5 feet in height. Areas with older and/or dense growth of unwanted vegetation may have selective treatments with herbicides prior to prescribed fire applications to better manage the desired control. Some of these areas may also have post prescribed fire selective treatments with herbicides. Areas where prescribed fire controls most of the unwanted vegetation would only have selective spot treatments with herbicides. Some areas may have unwanted vegetation controlled by prescribed fire and the use of herbicides may not be necessary. Herbicide applications will be done with low pressure backpack sprayers and/or cut surface treatments (stump treatment or injection). Once post-harvest herbicide treatments are implemented, periodic prescribed fire is planned for all of the areas to maintain the control of the unwanted vegetation and reduction of ground fuels. Some areas may require periodic selective spot applications with herbicides along with periodic prescribed fire for control of unwanted vegetation. Refer to Section 1.6.2 and Appendix E for more information on herbicides. Noxious weed control would continue annually until the eradication of the targeted species is obtained (USFS, 2002a). During mechanical treatments, hand-controlled devices (such as chain saws) primarily would be used, with some exceptions where a machine could be used to grind the midstory. The areas planned to have post-harvest evaluation for vegetation control needs are listed in **Table DN-2**.

Table DN-2. Stands with the Potential for Herbicide Use under Alternative 2

Compartment	Stands	Approx. Acres	RCW Habitat Type
5	1	58	Nesting
	2	60	Nesting
	3	40	Nesting
	4	84	Nesting
	5	19	Nesting
	6	61	Nesting
	7	53	Nesting
	9	21	Foraging
	11	9	Foraging
	50	31	Nesting

	51	10	Foraging
	52	17	Nesting
	53	9	Nest/Foraging
	54	57	Nesting
	55	6	Nesting
6	1	6	Nest/Foraging
	3	12	Nesting
	6	20	Nesting
	8	3	Foraging
	9	10	Nest/Foraging
	10	26	Nest/Foraging
	11	16	Nesting
	15	10	Nest/Foraging
8	1	26	Nest/Foraging
	3	11	Nesting
	4	32	Nest/Foraging
	5	19	Nesting
	6	21	Nesting
	7	16	Nest/Foraging
	8	34	Foraging
	10	29	Nesting
	11	19	Nesting
	13	6	Foraging
	19	31	Nesting
Total		887	

- Use and maintain the existing permanent road system. Annual maintenance, including blading, graveling/surface replacement, and mowing, and some pre-haul maintenance, including reshaping and ditch work for proper drainage, would occur on existing permanent roads in the project area prior to initiation of RCW habitat restoration activities (USFS, 2002a; 2003d).
- Construct approximately 1 mile of temporary road;
- Reopen and rehabilitate approximately 4.5 miles of temporary roads to access timber stands and utilize existing log landings within the project area where possible. These roads were used the last time timber was removed from the area (approximately 10 years ago), and reopening them would only involve minor disturbance. Understory vegetation would be cleared from the surfaces of these temporary roads, and gravel would be spread in dips, on slopes exceeding 10 percent, and at intersections with surfaced roads. **Table DN-3** presents a breakdown of the number of miles of existing and new temporary roads to be used in each compartment. In addition, this table presents the number and acreage of landings to be used in each compartment under Alternative 2.

Table DN-3. Landings and Roads By Compartment under Alternative 2

Comp.	No. of Landings (Approx. Total Acres)	Miles of Existing Temp. Roads Reopened	Miles of New Temp. Road Construction
5	22 (6 acres)	2.2	.5
6	11 (3 acres)	0.8	.25
8	20 (5 acres)	1.5	.25

Total	53 (14 acres)	4.5	1.0

- Provide nesting structures for squirrels within the recruitment stands: 2 structures within each new RCW recruitment area (60 structures total). These structures would be placed on posts within RCW recruitment stands.
- Reforest approximately 139 acres of SPB damaged stands scattered throughout the project area with pine seedlings (includes the 93 acres of shelterwood harvest listed previously);
- Restore 15 acres of canebrake adjacent to Caney Creek in five separate patches by reducing the overstory through girdling to a BA of 40 square feet. The girdled trees will be left standing in place.

Upon completion of the proposed vegetation management activities, all of the temporary roads would be closed except for administrative use; permanent roads would continue to be maintained as permanent roads. The majority of these temporary roads would be seeded with wildlife mixtures and native grasses and allowed to re-vegetate. However, some would be permanently maintained as wildlife openings. In addition, roads that access a RCW insert or natural RCW tree would be seeded and maintained.

Mitigation and Monitoring Measures

Mitigation measures are actions taken to lessen adverse impacts or enhance beneficial effects. General mitigation and monitoring measures are listed in Section 2.5 and in Appendix C of the EA. All mitigation and monitoring measures directly related to Alternative 2 are listed below.

During vegetation management activities, standard best management practices (BMPs) and Forest-wide standards and guidelines would be implemented as provided in the amended Forest Plan and *Georgia's Best Management Practices for Forestry*. Implementation of these BMPS would control or reduce potential adverse impacts from soil erosion, surface water runoff, and sedimentation. In addition to these, other measures would minimize or avoid adverse impacts to environmental resources during the proposed activities. **Table DN-4** lists these other measures according to the resource area affected. Appendix C also lists standard mitigation measures for prescribed burning and herbicide use that would be implemented under the action alternatives.

Table DN-4. Recommended Mitigation Measures By Resource Area

Resource Area	Mitigation Measure
Water Quality and Aquatic Species	• The USFS would stipulate that the contractor avoid use of heavy equipment when soils are wet, such as after a storm event. If work on saturated soils is not preventable, the USFS would require the contractor to use low ground pressure equipment, logging mats, or other techniques. • Planning and approval of log landing and skid trail locations would ensure that they are located in stable, well-drained areas, away from gullies. Skidding and decking would be limited to designated and approved routes along ridgetops and gentle side slopes to protect sensitive soils (i.e., wet and micaceous soils). • The USFS would require the contractor to conduct all timber harvest and

	roadwork activities in accordance with *Georgia's Best Management Practices for Forestry* and Forest Plan standards and guidelines. • Compacted soils on skid trails, temporary roads, and log landings would be tilled before seeding to increase water infiltration. • Drainage structures at existing stream crossings would be assessed to determine if maintenance, repair, or replacement is required to accommodate stream discharge and fish passage, and to protect water resources. • If wetlands within the project area are field-verified, thinning operations within the wetland boundaries would be avoided and performed to ensure that the function and value of the wetland is preserved.
Vegetation and Wildlife, Including PETS Species	• Log landing and skid trail locations would be reviewed and approved by the USFS prior to harvest to ensure they are appropriately planned to minimize soil impacts and damage to residual trees. • Compacted soils on skid trails, temporary roads, and log landings would be tilled before seeding to enhance revegetation. • No mechanical or herbicide treatment will be allowed during the RCW nesting season of April 4th through July 6th each year. • Certain log landings used for the project would be left open and maintained as wildlife openings over the long-term. These would include landings in: o Compartment 5, Stands 1, 3, 4, 6, 7; o Compartment 6, Stands 7, 15, 16; o Compartment 8, Stands 2, 8, 12, 20; Fruit trees would be planted along the edges of the above wildlife openings.

RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

Based on the analysis presented in the *RCW Habitat Restoration Project EA*, I have decided to select Alternative 2 because it best meets the purpose and need and the Forest-wide Goals discussed above. The following is the rationale for my decision.

I first eliminated the No Action Alternative (Alternative 1) since it failed to meet the purpose and need established for the project in several ways. Alternative 1 would result in a violation of the ESA, RCW EIS guidelines, the RCW Recovery Plan, and the current Forest Plan for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest. In addition, this alternative may adversely affect the RCW. In addition, since no thinning activities would occur under this alternative, general health of the forest stands in the project area would likely decline gradually, increasing the potential for southern pine beetle infestations. No noxious weed control would occur, and weeds would continue to spread, eventually taking over surrounding forest stands. While the No Action alternative would not directly affect soil and water resources, minor adverse impacts on these resources would continue to occur since gully restoration activities would not occur.

I next eliminated Alternative 3. Vegetation management methods proposed under Alternative 3 would not be as effective as those under Alternative 2, and would require more disturbance of the project area due to repeated treatments. Unlike herbicide treatments, midstory vegetation and noxious weeds would not likely be killed as a result of mechanical treatments proposed under

Alternative 3, at least initially. As a result, several mechanical release treatments would be required to eliminate these species due to the continual re-growth of selectively cut vegetation. More than one mechanical treatment in the same growing season may be required in some cases, and numerous mechanical treatments would likely be required in each stand over the next four to five years, especially in areas that contain invasive species.

This left Alternative 2 (Proposed Action). I found Alternative 2 (Proposed Action) superior because it provides a larger amount of suitable habitat for the RCW in less time, better meeting ESA requirements, RCW Recovery Plan objectives, and Forest Plan goals (Goal 51 and Management Prescription 8.D.1), and having a greater beneficial effect on the RCW over the long-term.

Activities proposed under Alternative 2 would enhance the quality of RCW habitat on the forest. Opening up the pine forest through thinning, with a focus on mature pine stands, and conducting midstory control through mechanical and chemical methods would not only improve forest health and reduce threats on RCW clusters from southern pine beetle infestations, but would make the project area more suitable for the RCW nesting and foraging. In combination with past and proposed future prescribed burning, which would maintain midstory control, the vegetation management activities under Alternative 2 would create ideal habitat for the RCW within the project area. Upon completion of vegetation management activities under Alternative 2, 10 to 20 RCW recruitment stands would be established within the project area. Inserts would be placed throughout these stands, which would provide nesting habitat for the species. Alternative 2 would be working toward the recovery objective for the RCW on the Oconee National Forest. In addition, this alternative would be keeping with the direction of the RCW Final EIS and ROD, Recovery Plan, and the ESA.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

In addition to the selected alternative (Alternative 2), I considered all of the other alternatives as presented in the EA. A complete description of these alternatives is provided in Chapter 2 of the EA. Mitigation and monitoring measures describe above would be followed on all action alternatives.

Alternative 1: No Action (Current Management): No vegetative thinning would occur within the project area, and current management of Compartments 5, 6 and 8 would continue. Current management includes periodic prescribed burning, some level of noxious weed control, and other activities permitted in the Forest Plan. There would continue to be some efforts made for the protection and enhancement of the RCW, including monitoring, placement of inserts, and removal of predators and nest cavity competitors; however, no direct efforts to improve the quality and quantity of RCW foraging and nesting habitat would be made. In addition, other resource-related activities, including gully restoration and aggressive noxious weed treatment, would not occur under this alternative.

Alternative 2: RCW Habitat Restoration (Proposed Action; Selected Alternative): This alternative is described above.

Alternative 3: RCW Habitat and Canebrake Restoration without Herbicide Use: This alternative primarily consists of using vegetation manipulation by thinning and midstory control (via mechanical methods and prescribed fire only) to help restore habitat for the RCW within Compartments 5, 6 and 8. Specific activities that would occur under Alternative 3 would be the same as those listed under Alternative 2 above, with the exception that no herbicides would be used to control midstory vegetation or noxious weeds within project area. Instead, hand-controlled devices (such as chain saws) would primarily be used, with some exceptions where a machine could be used to grind the midstory. Prescribed fire would be implemented along with this method, and would be conducted every three to five years, as needed, to eliminate midstory within RCW nesting and foraging areas.

ALTERNATIVES ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED STUDY

An alternative of improving RCW nesting opportunities by drilling nest holes and placing inserts in the project area, but not conducting vegetation management activities (i.e., thinning), was considered. Although nesting opportunities would be increased, the future planned translocation of RCW would not occur. This alternative was dismissed from further consideration because it does not meet the purpose and need of establishing overall favorable habitat for the RCW on the Forest and complying with the provisions of the ESA, the EIS and ROD for the *Management of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker and its Habitat on National Forests in the Southern Region,* the revised *Recovery Plan for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker*, and the direction established in the revised Forest Plan (2004). Without habitat management and restoration, the RCW would not migrate into the project area and translocation would not be attempted, regardless of whether additional nesting opportunities were provided, and the RCW recovery objectives would not be met on the Oconee National Forest (Piedmont Recovery Unit).

PUBLIC AND AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

A team of Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest personnel conducted public involvement with the primary objective of discovering the concerns of the public. USFS personnel took the following steps to gather issues from the public:

- On June 30, 2004, a scoping letter explaining the proposal to improve the habitat for RCW to meet the requirements of the Recovery Plan and RCW EIS within site specific information was mailed to 71 individuals and organizations that had previously expressed interest in the management of the Oconee Ranger District.

- In addition, the proposed action appeared in both print and Internet versions of the quarterly Scheduled of Proposed Actions for the Chattahoochee –Oconee National Forest in Georgia 2004.

- A legal notice requesting comments was also published in the *Eatonton Messenger* in June 2004. Two written responses were received during scooping and both responses were in favor of the project.

- On July 15, 2004, the Oconee RD invited all cooperating agencies (Federal and State), conservation groups, and environmental organizations, such as Georgia Forestwatch and the Sierra Club, to a presentation and site visit of the proposed project sites. No one attended this presentation.

- The EA was made available for the 30-day notice and comment period from August 26, 2004 to September 27, 2004. A legal notice summarizing the proposed project and notifying the public of the availability of the EA for comment published in *The Eatonton Messenger* on August 26, 2004. The EA was made available to the public on the Forest's Internet site. Copies of the EA also were mailed to those individuals that had responded by mail during the scoping period. One comment was received and reviewed by the interdisciplinary team. This comment, and the interdisciplinary team's response to this comment, is provided in Appendix F of the EA.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based on the EA, I have determined that Alternative 2, with the mitigating measures and management requirements applied, is not a major Federal action and, either individually or cumulatively, will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the preparation of an EIS is not necessary. This determination is based upon the following factors found at 40 CFR 1508.27 (b):

1. Both beneficial and adverse effects have been considered. The proposed actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of human environment. (EA pages 1-7 through 1-17; 3-1 through 3-43; and Appendix D and E).

2. Public health and safety are minimally affected by the proposed actions. (EA pages 1-14 through 1-15 and Appendix D and E).

3. Within the limited context of the planned actions along with the restrictions and mitigation measures (EA Section 2.5 and Appendix C), there will be no significant effect on any unique characteristics or features of the geographic area. (EA pages 1-7 through 1-17; 3-1 through 3-43; and Appendix D).

4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial based on new or unusual methods, tools, or quantity of activities being approved. (Issues from scoping efforts: EA pages 1-6 through 1-17). None of the actions involves an irreversible commitment of resources.

5. There are no known effects on the human environment that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. Numerous vegetation management projects of a similar nature have been completed on the Forest such that the environmental consequences (EA pages 1-7 through 1-17; 3-1 through 3-43; and Appendix D and E) of this project are well understood.

6. The actions in this decision will not set a precedent influencing approval of future actions with significant effects.

7. The possible cumulative effects of the proposed actions have been analyzed with consideration for past and reasonably foreseeable future activities on adjacent private and public lands. Each environmental component in Chapter 3 of the EA includes consideration of cumulative effects. The context and intensity of cumulative impacts over space and time will not be significant. (EA pages 3-1 through 3-43 and Appendix D and E).

8. The proposed actions will not adversely affect any sites listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places, nor will they cause the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. This is based on findings of site-specific cultural resource surveys of the project area and concurrence by the State of Georgia Historic Preservation office as per Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. (Heritage Resources Report and SHPO concurrence in Project Folder).

9. Implementing this decision will not adversely affect threatened or endangered species, or result in loss of any other species' viability, or create significant trends toward Federal listing of the species under the ESA. This determination is based site-specific surveys, the Biological Evaluation for the RCW Habitat Improvement Project (Appendix D of the EA), and concurrence from the USFWS under Section 7(a) (2) of the ESA. (USFWS concurrence in Project Folder).

10. None of the actions threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local laws imposed for the protection of the environment. The proposed actions will be implemented in a way that is consistent with the standards and management requirements established in the Forest Plan for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, and in site-specific mitigation measures. (EA Section 2.5 and Appendix C).

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

National Forest Management Act

This decision is consistent with the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976 regarding the effective management, use, and protection of the natural resources of the area affected by this project.

Forest Plan Consistency

I have determined that all actions of the selected alternative will be consistent with the management requirements for the revised Forest Plan for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, January 2004. This includes general standards of the Forest Plan and the specific management direction for lands in Management Prescriptions 8.D.1 (RCW Sub-Habitat Management Area), 9.F Rare Communities, 3.B Experimental Forests, and 11 (Riparian Corridors) as designated by the Forest Plan.

Vegetative Manipulation

Actions involving vegetative manipulation will meet the following applicable requirements of 36 CFR 219.27 (b):

1. The methods used are best suited to the multiple-use goals established for the area; potential environmental, biological, cultural, aesthetic, engineering, and economic impacts, have been considered in this determination.
2. No permanent impairment of site productivity is expected from the actions. Mitigation measures specified in the EA were designed to achieve these goals.
3. Actions were chosen after considering potential effects on residual trees and adjacent stands.
4. Actions will provide the desired effects on water quantity and quality, soil productivity, wildlife and fish habitat, recreation uses, aesthetic values, and other resource yields. Standards and guidelines along with *Georgia's Best Management Practices for Forestry* will be followed, and actions will comply with the Clean Water Act. The desired effects for each of these factors are described in the EA.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

The Decision is subject to appeal, pursuant to the USFS regulations 36 CFR 215.11 by those who provided comments or otherwise expressed interest in this particular proposal during the 30-day public comment period. A written Notice of Appeal of this decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.14, "Content of Notice of Appeal," including the reasons for appeal. Appeals must be postmarked or received in duplicate within 45 days after the legal notice publication date in *The Eatonton Messenger*. The appeal should be sent to: Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer, 1755 Cleveland Highway, Gainesville, Georgia, 30501.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of appeal disposition.

CONTACT INFORMATION

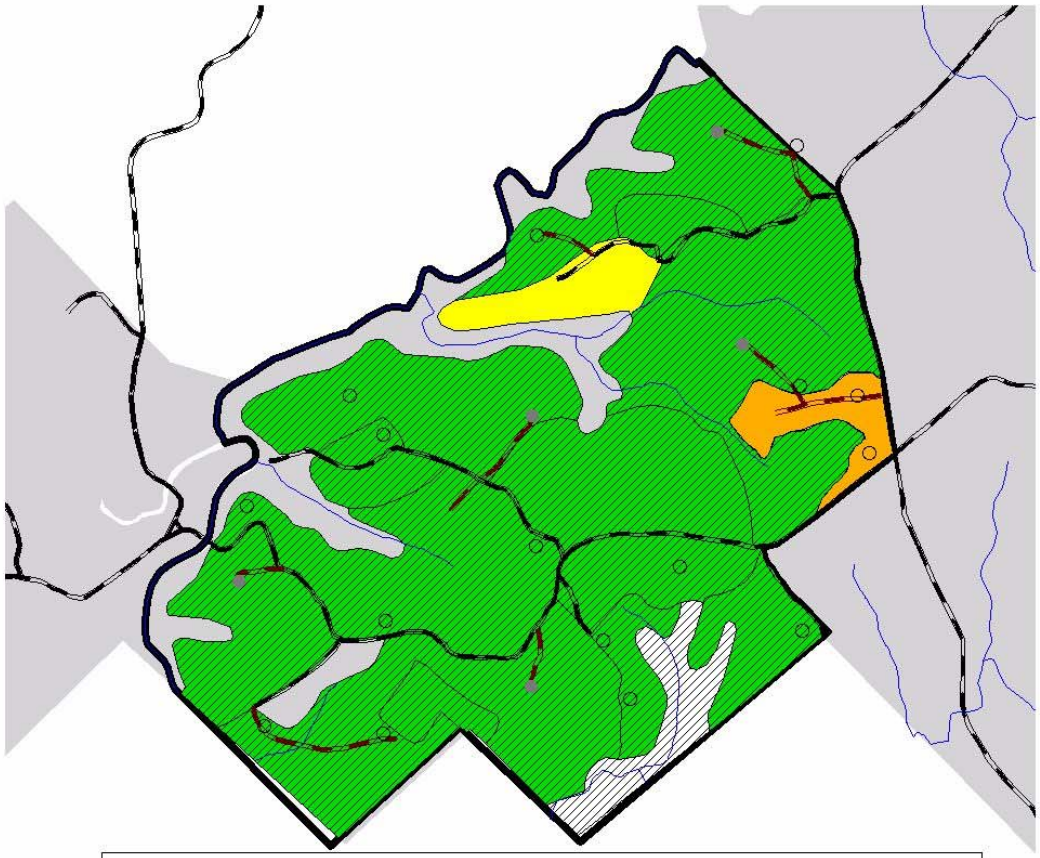
For additional information concerning this decision or on the appeals process, contact William Nightingale, Oconee District Ranger at: U.S. Forest Service, Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, Oconee Ranger District, 1199 Madison Highway, Eatonton, Georgia 31024, or phone (706) 485-7110, or by email at bnightingale@fs.fed.us.

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL APPROVAL

_____ _____

William Nightingale **Date**
Oconee District Ranger

Alternative 2 - Compartment 5



Legend

N

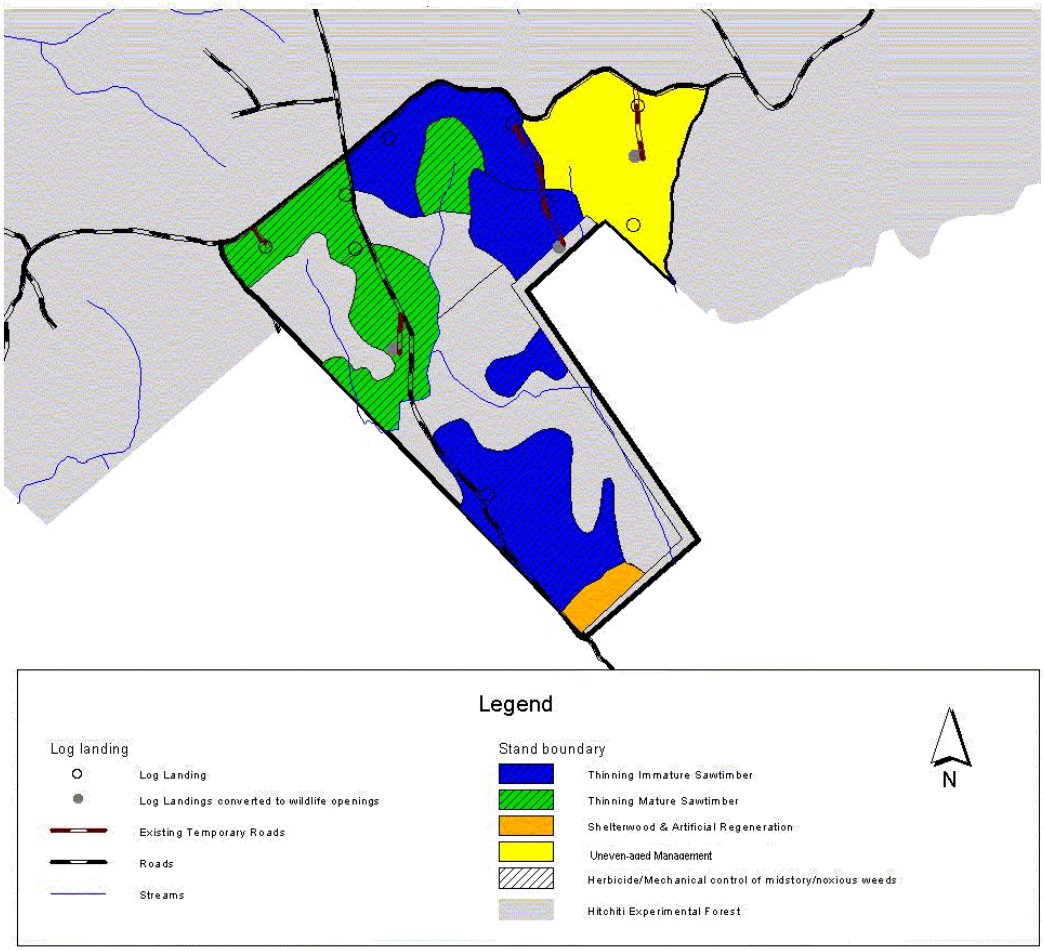
Log landings

- Log Landings
- Log Landings converted to wildlife openings
- Existing temporary roads
- Roads
- Streams

Stand boundary

- Herbicide/Mechanical control of midstory/noxious weeds
- Thinning Mature Sawtimber
- Shelterwood and Natural Regeneration
- Shelterwood and artificial regeneration
- Hitchiti Experimental Forest

Alternative 2 - Compartment 6



Alternative 2 - Compartment 8